

Expecting and Experiencing Negotiated Internationalisation: Lived Engagement of Chinese Students in an International Joint University

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Abstract : Transnational higher education (TNHE) is one of the most prominent symbols of higher education's internationalisation. The case university, Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU), represents an equal collaboration between its parent institutions as they are tied in academic strength. Therefore, compared to the more prescribed route of UNNC, which is working towards creating another UK university in China, XJTLU's future is fraught with uncertainty. Such kind of uncertainty underpins the rationale of selecting XJTLU as a case university in researching internationalisation -it does not aim to build an international university based on a template; instead, internationalisation in XJTLU is established in a more participatory manner that also reflects an understanding of its staff and students. Therefore, this article focuses on Chinese students' expectations and experiences in XJTLU. While there are research discussing international students' experiences in TNHE institutions, the experiences of Chinese students who attend their domestic TNHE have been less explored. This might be due to the potential issues they confront are not as intuitive as those faced by international students, whose experiences are largely shaped by mobility and cross-cultural transition, a well-documented and conceptualised phenomenon. Research regarding Chinese students mainly focuses on their motivations, for example, enhancing English proficiency, improving competitive advantage in labour market, and gaining an international perspective. However, it should be noted that these motivations are based on the internationalised features of TNHE institutions. Internationalisation in XJTLU is symbolised through 100% English-medium instruction, internationalised curriculum, and the national diversity of its students and staff. However, in practice, these promises for internationalisation are hardly met; for example, in terms of EMI, lecturers may engage in their native language, either out of their hope to enhance students' understanding or forcibly switch back to Chinese due to limited language capacity. Therefore, it could be seen that the non-application of internationalised policy may result in a negotiated internationalising experience for students. It is important to point out that, in this study, both the expected capital that students hope to access prior to their enrollment to XJTLU and the actual capital that students are accumulating during their attendance, are examined, as the difference between the actual and potential could be an important indicator of the discrepancy between how internationalisation is perceived and how it is enacted in practice. The potential resources implicate perceived compatibility between habitus and field, which is highly relevant to the way that a field makes itself known, whereas the actual resources represent the lived experience and the actual compatibility between habitus and field. This study explores the similarities and differences between the expected and lived capital from XJTLU, and the way that students form and navigate their expectations, in turn providing insights on how XJTLU, or HE internationalisation as a whole, is depicted, imagined, and enacted among Chinese students.

Keywords : transnational higher education, English-medium instruction, students' experience, Chinese higher education

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